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THE LODI GRAPE STORY, PART II

By Lucy Reller & Ralph Lea

In 1920 when the Prohibition Amendment went into effect nationwide, Lodi grapes were still sold at a good price. In 1921 and 1922 there was a rise in price when Tokay stripping sold in lug boxes for a premium price to be used for wine making by individuals.

▲ *1935 Grape Festival: Yanez Jackson, in a peasant costume and Cliff Gatzert as a Russian Cosack.*

The early money making years for Lodi growers were 1915, 1918-1922, the years of illicit wine-making, 1931, heavy burn, 1934, 1936, and 1941-1943.

The bad years were 1912, 1913 and 1914, the years of rain and mildew. 1916 and 1917 the frost years and the Prohibition years of 1923 to 1930.

Early Lodi Area Wineries

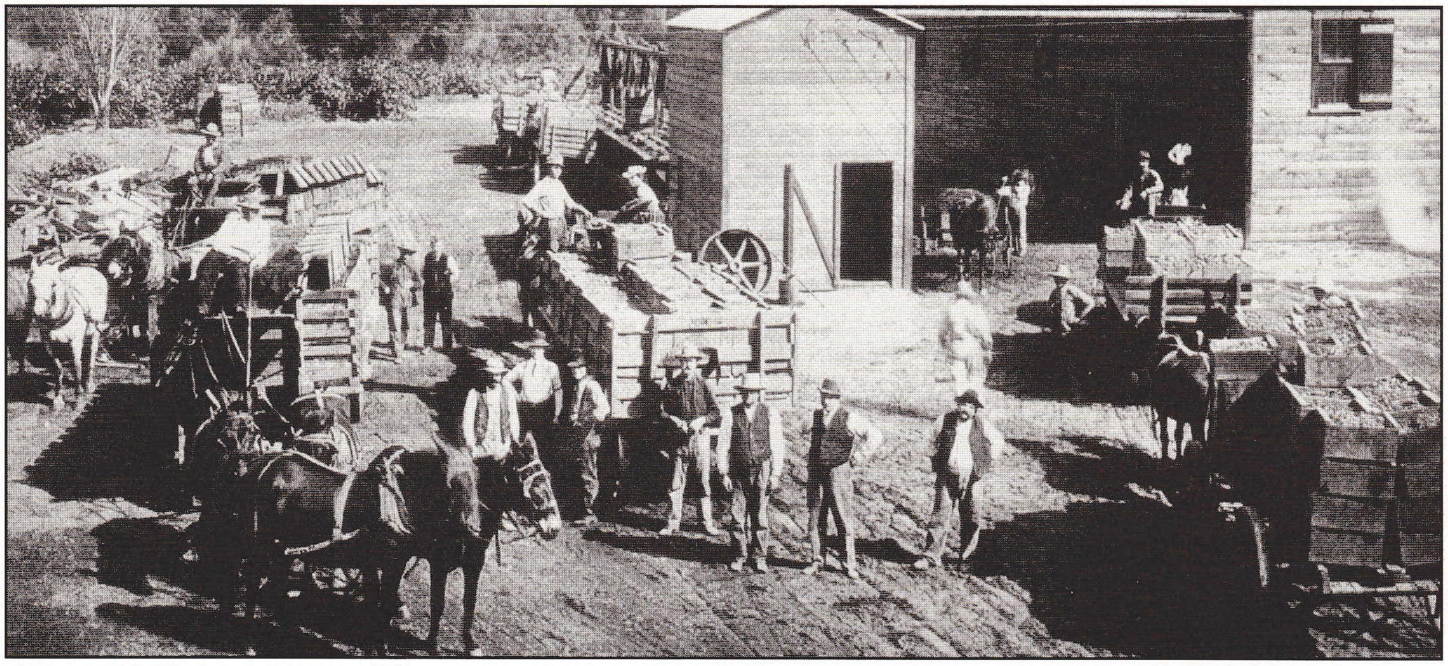
Lodi wine grape growers had to haul their grapes to the El Pinal, the George West and Son winery just north of Stockton. These were all day trips by team and wagons hauling three or four ton for $2.00 to $4.00 a ton.

The first commercial winery in the Lodi area was the Urgon, built in 1900 and located along the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks just a mile north of Lodi. It was built by Adolph Bauer, Jacob Brack and John Guggolz. Three years later it was sold to George West and Son and renamed the San Joaquin Winery.

About the same time, West built his winery in Lodi on Sacramento Street south of Lodi Avenue. Stockton Box Company and Spiekerman Concrete were located there later.

The Mokelumne Winery was built on the north end of Sacramento Street. It was owned by Lee Jones, who later sold to the growers turned it into a co-op named The Community Winery.

In 1905 The Woodbridge Vineyard Association opened in Woodbridge.



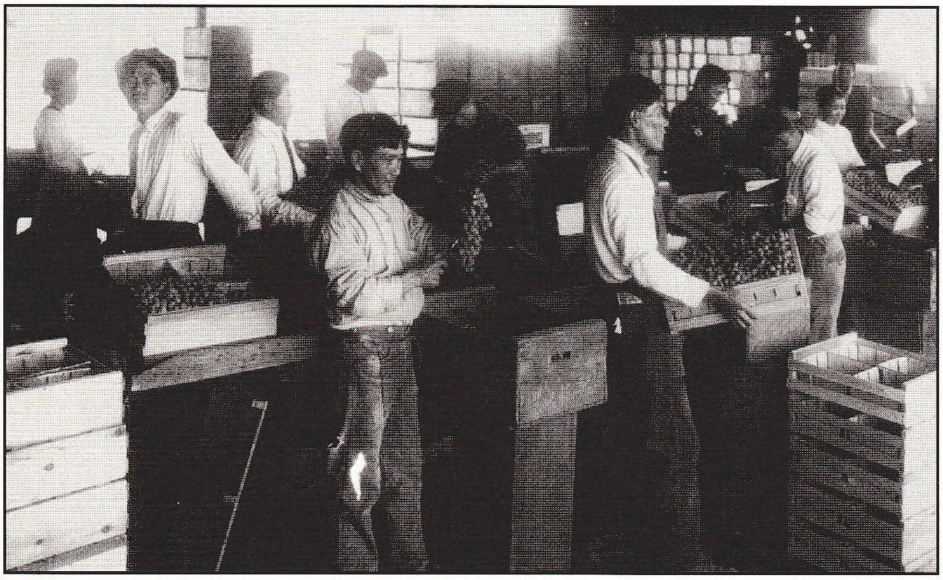
▲ *Community Grape Corporation on North Sacramento Street at the Mokelumne River.*

This was the first cooperative winery. Victor Winery was next, followed by Roma, Shewan and Jones, Bear Creek, Eastside, Del Rio, Cherokee, Lodi and Del Pasco.

By 1912 George West had Fred Koenig managing San Joaquin Winery, Lee Jones managing Victor and Adolph Bauer in charge of West's Lodi Winery. The George West and Son Winery was controlled by the California Wine Association. West was offering growers a ten year contract at $10.00 a ton for wine grapes.

C.V. Darrah purchased the Earl Fruit Company shed in Woodbridge next to his own shed giving him a five-car loading capacity. Some new shippers were S.A. Gerrard–1922, W.G. Micke–1922, Krasnow and Sons –1922, Tracy-Walden-1921, Browie-1923, Bailey and National Fruit Product Company-1924.

In 1924 Lodi had a new board of growers and shippers that were fighting the high railroad rates.



▲ *B.F. Langford Ranch, northeast of Lodi in 1910. Japanese grape packers using the four basket plum box.*

Charles Beckman, local manager of T.H. Peppers Fruit Company reports $80.00 a ton for zinfandel grapes and $40.00 a ton for Tokays. The Tokays had a problem getting the usual red color but they escaped sunburn and mildew was light in 1924.

The following year, L.K. Marshall of the California Fruit Exchange was promoting proper pruning and irrigation plus thinning to influence the size and quality of the Tokay grape crop.

Lodi vineyardists gave strong support for a county standardization law that followed the standards set by the state. They also spent money for grape advertising, but that failed.

There was an experiment drying Tokay grapes to make raisins but it was a failure. Many grapes sold after October 20 showed a loss (red ink).

In contrast, W.G. Micke sold some field lugs for $3.60 each.

1926 – There are 49 grape shippers in the Lodi District. Oscar L. Mars, grower and shipper has solved the problem of mold and mildew while grapes are in transit to market. After the grapes are loaded and braced in the railroad cars, a large can of sulphur is burned in the car to dry the air, kill insect life and seal crushed grapes.

▲ *There has to be an easier way to load and haul wine grapes.* *Photo courtesy of S.J. Co. Historical Museum*

1927 – The Lodi District Chamber of Commerce promotes the grape growing industry. Area growers sign up for State Vineyardist Association headed by Burton A. Towne of Lodi. Freight rates are up 10 percent.

1928 – August 15, Clearing House for Tokay Organization with James T. Langford, first president. 20 shippers set price at $1.40 a box. J.E. Devine resigns as manager of Pioneer Fruit Company and starts working for American Fruit Growers under Norm D. Swim. H.C. Pope becomes new manager of Pioneer Fruit Company.

Each year E.A. Humphrey, local manager of the Earl Fruit Company urges the thinning of Tokay vines. Growers vote to allow more grapes to go under fancy pack and the rest had to grade U.S. No.1, 60 percent had to be colored red. In previous years, the minimum was 75 percent.

In January Burton A. Towne was re-elected president of the California Vineyardist Association. The group started a volunteer Penny-A-Package advertising fund that collected over $30,000.00.

L.T. Mason urges a standard lug for table grapes and quality control.

W.H. Thompson gives crop loss total due to sunburn and mildew.

September 5, 1928, three carloads of Tokay grapes were packed in sawdust in large drums and sent by steamer to Manila and Hong Kong by Pacific Fruit Exchange.

September 8, 1928, due to high temperatures the coloring of the Tokays is slow although sugar content is up. Shipments of juice grapes are quite heavy. Price declines on juice so they declare three day close.

September 15 – Tokay prices are lower because of poor color.

September 22 – Hot weather in the East injures juice market. Too hot to crush for wine.

October 6, 1928 – $50.00 for Alicantes, $45.00 to $47.50 a ton for both Zinfandels and Carrignans.

Holidays, such as Columbus Day and others close the market in the East which lowered the price.

In October the California Vineyardists Association makes a deal with the National Association of Chain Store Operators to purchase 60 percent of the 1929 Tokay crop. The Tokay Clearing House Manager held a conference daily with local shippers.

July 13, 1929, 813 growers out of the 949 signed California Vineyardist Association contracts which covered 28,250 acres out of 31,000 acres.

October 3, 1930 – Fruit Industries, Inc. was crushing 250 tons daily to make grape syrups stored in five-gallon cans for future processing and marketing.

October 9 – grape shippers shut down for three days but over 11,000 cars of all grape varieties were shipped from Lodi. By the end of October, 2,489,337 packages of Tokay grapes sold in the East at an average price of $1.15.

New grape shippers were Ashley Fruit - 1927, Pope Bros.-1928, Scobel & Day, and Vita Fruit Products –1930.

D.D. Conn, Director of California Vineyardist Association was asking growers to pull out low yielding vines but there was no loan money available.

With the okay from the Federal Government under the Volstead Act (prohibition) there were five wineries in the Lodi making grape juice plus sacramental wines. Community Winery made Vine-Glo concentrated in four flavors. Woodbridge was operated by Castellani Alcohol Co., Sebastiani Wine Co., Roma Winery, and Looser at Urgon (Lodi).

In 1931 the wage scale was 25¢ an hour for field help or 10¢ per display lug packing in the field. Box making paid 50¢-70¢ per 100 while

▲ *Loading grapes directly into the refrigerator railroad cars in Lodi. (circa 1910)*

▲ *1922 Victor area: The land was not leveled before planting. Building dams was a big labor event.* *Charles Lewis Photo*

labeling paid 15¢ per 100, and car loading was 40¢ per hour.

Shipping Tokays by boat to New York was tested but the grapes arrived in poor condition.

Fruit Industries (Community) was paying $15.00 per ton for zinfandel and Petit Sirah grapes.

In July, 1932 there was 50 percent sunburn damage to Tokays and on September 1, Frank Aberle opened offices for the California Grape Board at 2 West Pine Street. The group set a daily limit of 50 railroad cars by the shippers Earl, American, Pacific, S.A. Gerard, Frank Buck, Scobel & Day, Dougherty, Peppers, Woodbridge, Ed Kurtz, Ampere, Victor, California, Chapdelaine, Lorenz, L.K. Marshall, F.H. Villinger, W.G. Micke, Handel, Lange & Handel and Richmond & Sandell. United Packing Company was not interested and on September 20 a meeting was called when the limit was exceeded by 17 cars.

The shippers move to delay grape harvest until "they are fit to eat." The growers formed three districts – Victor, Lafayette and Bruella (Farm Bureau Centers) with James T. Langford, Chairman. The group tried to control grape shipments by controlling quality. They started testing grapes on the basis of acid-sugar content.

Earl Fruit Company, located on the southwest corner of Main and Pine streets since 1902, moves to the northwest corner of Elm and Main streets.

By the end of September, 1932 there were more zinfandels shipped than Tokay grapes.

January 17, 1933 the California Tokay Growers came into existence. The group consisted of James Langford as Group Chief, R.C. Bridge, D.S. Smith, A.L. Paddleford, George LeFeber and R.H. DeVinny of Bruella; Frank Aberle, W.E. Garrison, W.V. Jahant, J.C. Skinner, Charles Spiekerman and Ray Van Buskirk of Lafayette; R.J. Custer, E.M. Kenison, E.J. Mettler, Adolph Nies, Herman Volbrecht and Dave Weigum of Victor. The group tried to control Tokay shipments and ask for Federal Marking Agreement. E.A. Humphrey, Manager of the Earl Fruit Company and Adolph Nies, Manager of Victor Fruit Company were on the state committee to establish standard weight of 29 pounds for grape packages.

Roma Winery is enlarging their facilities plus adding a large bottling room. A new second winery at Wood-

▲ *Grape workers on Lawrence Ranch, Lodi. Picture taken by George Lawrence.*

▲ *Unidentified group of grape workers.*

bridge is built by the Puente de Madera Wine Co. Woodbridge Vineyard Association leases the Franklin Bradford Winery. H.E. Looser and F.J. Hurd enlarge and reactivate the Urgon Winery.

The Community, Shewan-Jones and Jacob Knoll Winery are also operating in 1933.

It was Thursday, September 21, 1993 when 250 grape workers attended a meeting at Municipal Park (Hale) in Lodi to hear traveling representatives, supposedly of the Communist party, exhort workers to not work for less than 40¢ an hour.

Members of the cannery and industrial workers union could vote for local officers.

The hat was passed for funds to defend any member arrested in case of a strike.

Most Lodi grape growers were picking grapes and paying by the box, piece work where workers could earn only if they produced. A few paid 25-30¢ an hour for pickers who selected grapes in large lugs that were taken to packing sheds for the ladies who culled and placed the grapes in shipping boxes.

The union voted to strike Tuesday night if growers would not pay 40¢ an hour plus time and a half for work over eight hours a day.

Wednesday morning Constable C.R. Fisher was busy protecting both the worker and vineyard owners from threats by strike leaders. County Sheriff Harvey O'Dell and Deputy Ernie Hill, plus several highway patrolmen were on hand to prevent violence.

Monday night, October 2, 1933 the striking workers met at Municipal

▲ *George Lewis and Tokays in Victor, 1924.* *Charles Lewis Photo*

Park and at the same time Lodi businessmen held an indignation meeting against activities of labor agitators. The indigents on the streets were creating a loss of business when women customers stayed away.

The Lodi Theater was rented for farmers and businessmen the next day at 12 o'clock to take action to drive the disturbers from the city.

Forty San Joaquin County deputies, local farmers and shippers, all under the command of Colonel Garrison controlled the crowd at Elm and Sacramento streets where strike agitators collected.

That evening when the strikers and a large crowd of curious Lodians gathered in Municipal (Hale) Park the Lodi police and firemen sprayed the leaders with fire hoses.

By Thursday morning 34 agitators were awaiting trial in jail. At 8:00 a.m. Mat Beronio, local grape foreman, called at a small house on East Locust Street to arrest G. Secco who shot Beronio six times. The first bullet was fired through the door window. A little over an hour later the Lodi Sentinel had an extra on the street.

All suspicious characters in the City of Lodi were rounded up and held at Municipal Park. After being questioned, five were arrested for disturbing the peace.

Judge Solkmore held hearings and of the 44 men, most were represented by G. Anderson, attorney for the cannery and agricultural workers industrial union. Most were released on bond of $250.

A day later the strike was over and the Chamber of Commerce closed their labor office as plenty of help was available.

The dinner that C.S. Jackson held later for all the extra time worked by police and firemen was the start of planning for the first Lodi Grape Festival.

September 15, 1933 the Lodi Tokay shippers plan voluntary control of Tokay shipments since the Federal Tokay Marketing Agreement would not be effective until midnight September 29, 1933.

October 1, 1933, shipments went from 140 railroad cars daily down to 54. Price range was 70¢ to $1.20 a box, averaging $1.16 per box. The Lodi wine industry is banking on the repeal of prohibition by a large crushing of grapes plus the selling of stored wines they now have.

December 5, 1933 was the date of the repeal of the 19th Amendment (prohibition). Six months earlier the San Joaquin County voters had 17,566 to repeal and 4,417 for retention of prohibition.

In 1934 there were 11 wineries in the Lodi area with Eastside, Bear Creek and Del Rio having been added.

On May 22, 1934 the Tokay Marketing Group opened an office in the Hotel Lodi Building, formerly occupied by the California Tokay Growers. Jack Melby was employed as a paid secretary, Hugh McKenzie Chairman, and James Prentice, Secretary.

▲ *December 19, 1922: The leaves are gone but the grapes are left on the Tokay vines as a result of the railroad car shortage.* *Charles Lewis Photo*

There were seven Tokay districts formed: Acampo, which covered all the areas north of the Mokelumne River, Woodbridge, Victor, Lafayette, Live Oak, American River and Florin-Elk Grove. Each district elected ten members who urged no prorate in 1934 because Lodi experienced a 50 percent burn, but they recommended a Clearing House.

Because the crop was estimated at 70 percent the growers planned to control shipments by high quality standards. The shippers failed to impose a prorate but instead had a "Gentlemen's Agreement" which drew complaints.

The first Lodi Grape Festival was held on September 7, 8 and 9, 1934.

In 1935 there were 15,000 to 16,000 acres of Tokay vines and 900 growers.

September, 1935 the A.A.N., a federal group, cancelled the Tokay Marketing Agreement but the Lodi Tokay shippers opened their clearing house and began daily market news in local newspapers.

By the 10th of October heavy rains created serious damage to the grapes and the low prices offered at the wineries forced Tokay growers to continue shipping out of the area.

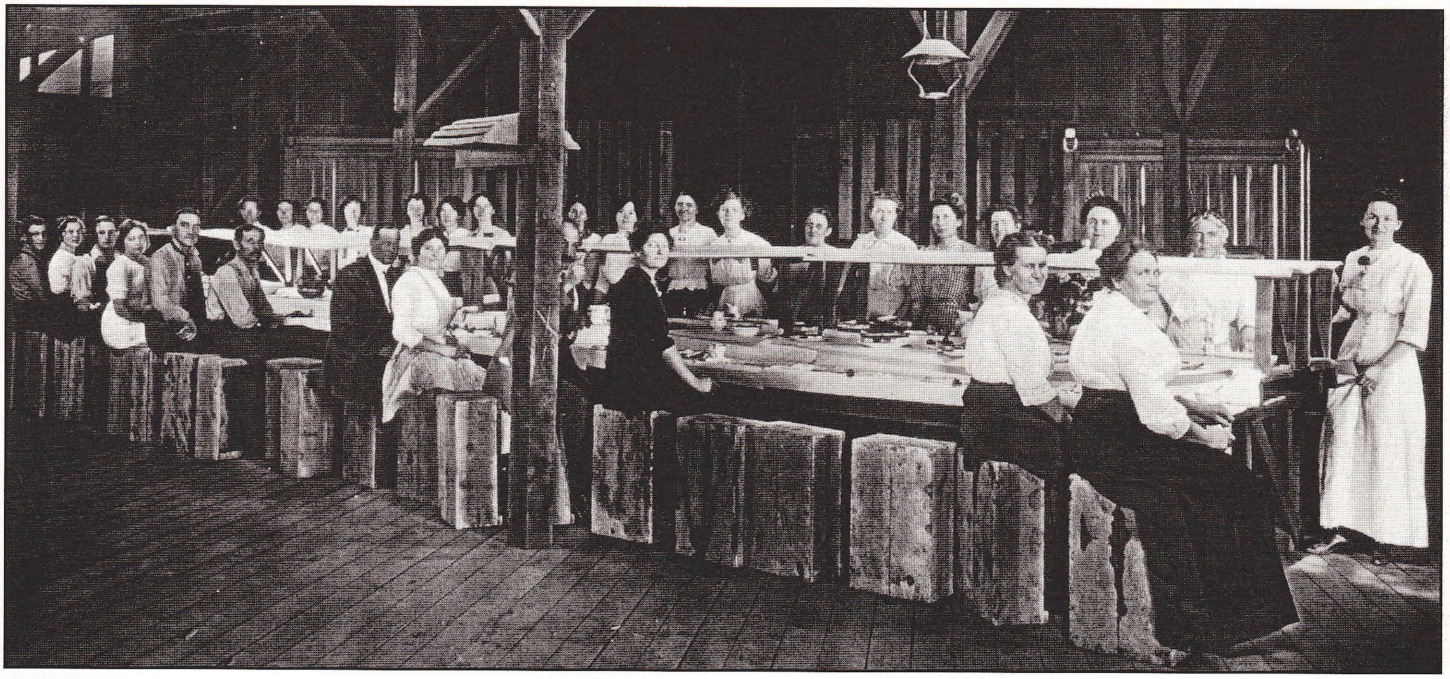
1936 saw the worst mildew in Lodi grapes since 1923.

The market was strong in Lodi because of a short crop of grapes in other parts of the state. Wine consumption in the U.S. had risen to .68 gallon per capita (person).

In 1937 a large crop was predicted and an unusually hot August brought the sugar content up.

The wage scale set field work at 35¢ an hour, and packing house employees 40¢ an hour. Piece work was popular in field packing.

James M. Prentice notes that the Tokays have such a short season that growers are forced to move the crop fast. The heads of the shipping companies want decreased Tokay shipments to increase the price but also want volume so that they can make money. Prentice names the Thompson Seedless the competition. He suggests advertising the high food value



▲ *Party for the Mason Bros. packing crew.*

Vesta Mason Photo

of Tokay and the need to fight the old superstition that seeds in grapes can cause appendicitis. Charges were brought against the chain stores for forcing down the Tokay price by using them as a "loss leader" or football.

In July, 1938 the California Grape Producers voted for a prorate program for wine grapes, where you delivered your grapes to a winery who paid you $15.00 a ton for 55% of the grapes delivered to be used in wine. The remaining 45% of grapes were to be used in making brandy and sold at a later date. Even though the plan was dropped in 1939 and later ruled illegal by the U.S. Government, some brandy, as much as six years old, realized $18.00 a ton.

In October the fresh Tokay shipments were over 120 railroad cars daily and the price went down to 80¢ a box.

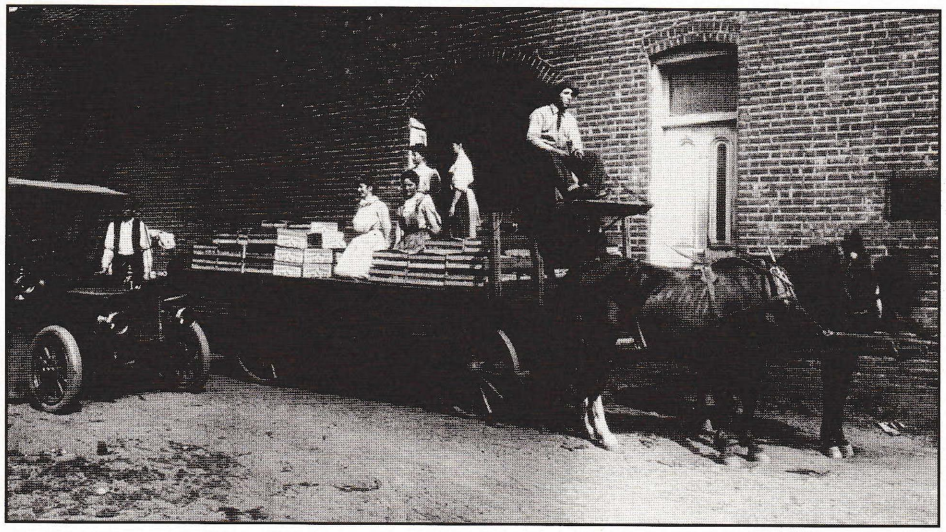
1939 without any prorate the season was a repeat of the previous year, with shipments over a hundred railroad cars a day by mid-September. The Lodi shippers finally urged a holiday from loading cars. It was not observed too well and 86 cars were shipped. Rain in early October slowed the picking to a walk. The year 1939 was a red ink year. Large tonnage plus damaging rain equaled disastrous prices.

Most years, except during war periods, the auction price went down as the volume of shipments increased.

Tokays in Lodi had a tendency to all ripen at one time, causing havoc with the marketing price. Quality of the grapes had little effect on the price when the markets were flooded with California grapes.

Selling grapes in Lodi for cash with the buyer paying the freight was the best for the grower and the shipper. Sales F.O.B., usual terms, were a sort of consignment transaction whereby the buyer finds fault with the quality of the fruit in cases where the prices fall between the time the shipment is loaded in Lodi until it reaches its destination. On the other hand, if prices rise during this interval, the buyer is satisfied with quality and accepts the fruit at the previously agreed price.

By November 20, 1939 it was apparent that volunteer methods were not working so the Lodi District Chamber of Commerce called a meeting to discuss a new marketing agree-



▲ *Mason Bros. Ice House, located on the northwest corner of Locust and Main Streets. L to R: L.T. Mason, Louise Deumenther, Mamie Milloglav, Mable Owens, Annie McKenzie and Perry Clark.*

Irene Wasik Photo

1940; L to R: Bill Hensel; Albert Nies, Manager of the Valley Fruit Co.; and Reinhold Bechthold, Manager of the Victor Fruit Co. ▲

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ment for Tokay grapes. D.D. Smith, Chamber president and W.B. Parker, a Morada resident, and Director of the California State Department of Agriculture and 150 Lodi growers attended the meeting.

The end of December saw the volume plans defeated but quality control with grade standards and an Information Clearing House were approved.

By July, 1940 at least 22 Lodi shippers endorsed the Tokay Marketing Agreement for 18,000 acres of Tokays.

None of the troubles of the Lodi Tokay grape deal went away, but a new approach was started with fresh hope.

▲ *Seaton (S. Main St.) Lodi Avenue South: Pioneer Fruit Co. and the Stewart Fruit Co. (circa 1920)*